VIRTUAL MEETING GUIDE

CONFERENCE &
EVENT SERVICES

SONOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

contents

Virtual Meetings Guide

Leading a Virtual Meeting

Virtual meetings & events are different than in-person, and as such, you must accept and appreciate the differences. If you try to approach your virtual meeting the same as its traditional counterpart, you will be disappointed by the outcome. However, with proper planning and slight adjustments, your event can be just as successful conducted virtually.

Share the Game Plan

Getting information to attedees early will give them an idea of what to expect and prepare for, increasing their commitment to and engagement during the meeting. Send out the agenda or program, as well as any info for other apps or platforms that may be used during the meeting, so that they can install and familiarize themselves with those ahead of time.

For events with networking, ask attendees to update screen name to include their title and/or organization

Keep Everyone Engaged

The average human's attention span is only eight seconds. When it comes to a virtual meeting, you are competing with so many other distractions (kids, emails, delivery man, etc.) that a few seconds is all it takes for you to lose the audience's attention. Consider implementing any or all of the following tactics to create more engaging virtual meetings:

Implement a variety of methods in delivering information (ie. powerpoint slides, videos, graphs)

In a recurring meeting, mix up your roles by rotating who presents or shares each week

Use the Polling feature on Zoom to get real-time feedback from the group

Kahoot and Mentimeter are other fan-favorites for conducting real-time polling and gamification

Do a round of prompted questions where the moderator asks attendees to share with the group

Set the Ground Rules

The first order of business when starting the meeting should be to establish the ground rules and expectations. As the host, you should take this time to welcome your attendees and set the meeting guidelines. Some examples you may choose to implement:

Host mutes all guests except the meeting leader as the default setting, the host can (or give permission to) unmute guests to ask a question or make a comment

Ask attendees to use the **"raise hand"** icon to indicate they would like to speak. [Note - you will need to turn on the "Nonverbal Feedback" feature on Zoom to enable the "raise hand" and other reactionary icons in the meeting settings]

Reiterate the agenda for the meeting and specify what time will be dedicated to presentations and information versus questions and discussion.

For additional suggestions on leading more engaging meetings, check out this list from Cvent

Leading a Virtual Meeting continued

The Host Will See You Now

Zoom's Waiting Room can be a useful tool for managing your meeting attendees, while also adding customization and an additional level of security to your meeting.

Use the Waiting Room as a placeholder for attendees prior to the start of your program. You can customize this space to provide more information about your organization or meeting topic. Once attendees are in the Waiting Room, the host will need to admit them to the actual meeting. As the host, you have the option to "Admit All" or admit attendees individually. This can be a good security check to ensure your meeting doesn't fall victim to a "Zoom-bomber" or other unwelcome guest.

For more information and guidance on the Waiting Room, check out this article.

Share & Collaborate in Real Time

You may not be in the same room (or building, or even town), but Zoom makes it easy to feel like you are. Use the Screen Sharing feature to share presentations, documents, photos, or "how to's".

If you are looking for a more collaborative option (ie. brainstorm session, team development, etc.) click on the Whiteboard option after selecting Share Screen. In this mode, your team can collaborate on a single shared screen in real time. [*Note - Each attendee will need to have annotations enabled for the meeting*]

Open the content you'd like to share on a separate browser so attendees can't see other tabs you may have open.

Accessibility

As events have needed to transition to virtual platforms, organizations have been proactive in reaching their attendees through webinars, virtual classes and tours, or other meeting programs. As an organization, it is important to remember that these valuable resources remain accessible to those who need accommodations. Below are some helpful tips for keeping your virtual event accessible and inclusive to all attendees.

Communication tips:

Make sure to have your contact information available on the registration page so guests can request accommodations if needed

Include accommodation questions in your registration questions

You can also include accessibility symbols on your agenda or registration site. This will show accommodations that are already offered, such as captioning

Note: Symbols are not detected by screen readers. Symbols can be included, but never in lieu of text. Be sure to list any accommodations offered.

All registration deadlines should be the same whether an attendee is requesting an accommodation or not. It is important to make sure that your registration deadline matches your deadline to request accommodations. This will provide a consistent experience to all attendees and avoid potential confusion

Additional Items to Consider

- Is the platform accessible for a person who uses screen-reading software?

- Are videos and images audio-described?

- Are presenters ensuring all their visual material is accessible for attendees?

- Is there a convenient way for attendees to request accommodations when registering for the event? During the event?

Virtual Platform Spotlight: Zoom

This program, like many others, offers a variety of accessibility features. You can view all the ways Zoom provides easy access to guests on their accessibility site.

Zoom allows you to assign a presenter or moderator to live type closed captioning. The directions for this feature can be found here.

Third party software live captioning Communication access real-time translation (CART) is also available through zoom.

Accessibility continued

Disability Services for Students

Students on campus needing any virtual accommodations are encouraged to contact Disability Services for Students (DSS). This department will be able to connect current, and future students, with the appropriate accommodations needed for attending a virtual event.
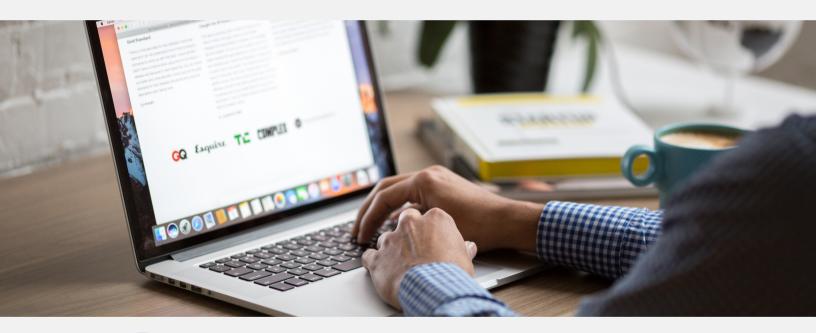
Students attending, or planning an event, and wish to have the necessary accommodations should make a request to DSS 10 business days prior to the event.

It is also important for students on campus to review the rights and responsibilities they have when requesting accommodations.

DSS Contact

General Questions
disability.services@
sonoma.edu

For individual staff
please click here.

Campus Accessibility Contact

Brad Starkey-Owens
Accessibility Services Analyst
Information Technology

starkeyowe@sonoma.edu

Accessibility Center

Student Organizations or Departments on campus seeking information on how to make their documents, presentations, or websites more accessible during their virtual events are encouraged to visit Sonoma State's Accessibility website.

On this site you can find demo videos on how to make your Word documents and Google docs accessible for screen readers.

Tips for Hosts and Presenters

DO A TECH CHECK

- Make sure your devices, Zoom software, and plugins are up to date prior to the event. You do not want to cause an event delay waiting for an update.

- Shut down and restart your device the morning of or night prior to the event so that your machine is not "tired". It is wise to have a backup device available too, just in case.

LIMIT WIFI USE

- Use a wired ethernet connection for the most secure internet access. If you must use wifi, position yourself near the router, disconnect as many unused devices from your network as possible (Smart TVs, iPads, Google Home, Amazon Echo, etc.), and ask the other members of your household to refrain from using wifi during the event.

- If calling via phone for your audio, disconnect wifi-calling from your phone. This way your audio is not dependent on your internet connection.

GIVE YOUR ATTENDEES A BREAK

- Keep your speakers on a schedule, and whenever possible, limit individual presentations to 30 minutes or less. An hour-long keynote address may be a staple of most events, but when it's watched from a computer screen, it can feel mentally taxing and lose its impact.

- If your event is over one hour long, make sure to schedule breaks to give everyone a chance to stretch and step away from the computer.

- Instead of shuffling your attendees in and out of the "Waiting Room" during breaks, consider creating a video or photo loop to play instead. You can add a timer to the loop to let attendees know when the live broadcast will return.
  - *BONUS! If you have sponsors for your event, this is an excellent opportunity for sponsor recognition!*

SOUND YOUR BEST

- Use an external microphone if possible. Headphones with an in-line microphone or an external mic (such as a podcast mic) and separate headphones will provide better sound quality. Laptop mics should be used as a last resort as they pick up extra noise.
  - *Be careful when using headphone mics! If the microphone hits at your chest it will pick up noise and feedback from any movements you make.*

- If you have the budget, consider hiring an event production company to produce the event. They will have access to the cameras, microphones, and technology to take your production from "home movie" to studio quality.

MORE TIPS

BE CAMERA READY

- Set yourself up in a space with good lighting - natural lighting is best. The light source should be in front of you.

- Avoid windows as your background as this will cause you to look like a shadow figure on the video feed. Consider purchasing an LED Ring Light to create the lighting you need.

- Your background should be not be busy or distracting. A wall with a bookshelf, photos or art is best. Consider using a virtual Zoom background. Avoid wearing green clothing if using a virtual background.

- Make sure the camera lens is clean!

- Place the camera at eye level or above, with yourself centered horizontally on the screen, and line up your eyes at the top third of the screen.

- Look at the iris of the camera, this will make it seem like you are talking to the attendees. If needed, put a small happy face or picture just above your webcam to focus on.

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

- Use all of the host features to your advantage. For example, you can toggle on and off the main camera feed and microphone. Use this to share the host's reactions to content shared by a presenter, or to hide their feed and sound if they need a stretch or bathroom break.

- If you have charged attendees a fee to attend the event, make sure you maintain the value of exclusivity. You can share recordings or presentations to those who have registered post-event, but do not publish them in a place where they can be freely accessed by anyone (ie. your website or YouTube).

DON'T OVERSHARE

- Have your screen share content open and ready to present before the program begins.

- Whenever possible, share only the window, document, or image you want to showcase. If sharing your desktop, make sure the background is appropriate or event branded. Use dual monitors when possible, to give you ample space for all your presentation needs.

- Close or hide email windows, anything with sensitive information, extra applications or browser tabs, and turn off on-screen notifications and messenger services.

LASTLY

IF Q&A STARTS TO FEEL LIKE AN INTERROGATION

- If your Q&A chat is overflowing and you are tight on time, do not fret! You have options:

- Have your moderator keep an eye out for FAQs, and answer those live.

- Delegate others on your team to respond to questions directly in the chat.

- For questions you do not get to during the live broadcast, record a separate session post-event which you record questions and answers and email out to attendees.

HAVE BACK UP

- Have a team of co-hosts so that the portal doesn't close if the main host experiences a drop in connection or other technical failure. Furthermore, every member of the hosting team should have a copy of every presentation saved on their device. This will allow you to make a smooth transition should any host or presenter drop off the connection.

- Utilize some form of back-channel communication, such as Group texts, Slack Channels, or instant messenger apps, where your team can connect outside the meeting portal. If the speaker is different from the person operating the presentation, use this back-channel to communicate when to advance slides.

PREPARE CONTINGENCY PLANS

- Despite your best efforts in preparation, technical difficulties may be unavoidable. However, having a plan in case these come up will keep you in control and the event running smoothly.

- Create a plan to fill time during a technical difficulty (aka Vamping). This can include: banter between hosts, questions from the audience, trivia, a break for a sponsored message, or skipping ahead in the program. [Note - if you do skip ahead, make sure you explain to your attendees that you are deviating from the schedule]

THE ULTIMATE FAIL-SAFE

- Depending on the nature of the event, it may be worth your while to fully record a version of the event ahead of time. This way even in the face of total catastrophe, you can email the content to your attendees so they can watch it immediately. They have already set aside the time to participate and you want to respect that.